



40 x 40 Chikuwa Kaigi New Year's Eve SS (Pixiv)

40×40ちくわ会議

R350L / UNOU Sanou

oyajidesu : Raws

Translation, editing, typesetting, all done by

oyajidesukara

oyajidesukara : Tumblr

oyajidesukara@gmail.com : Email

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"Thank you for your hard work, Chief Tomiyama, Chief Hayashi!"

"Happy New Year!"

"Yeah, see you next year."

"Have a good one!"

On the night of their last day of work, Chiefs Tomiyama and Hayashi's coworkers broke into smaller groups with the end-of-the-year party finished.

Exhaling a foggy, alcohol-tinged breath, Eiji Tomiyama turned to his boyfriend.

"When are we having a get-together? New Year's Eve? Certainly not the start of the New Year? Mai's boyfriend won't make it. I never asked him, though!"

"Yeah, now that you mention it, I have his LINE. Give me a second... Wait, what? Seriously?"

With his breath fogging his glasses, Koichi Hayashi clutched at his phone. "No, wait... ah damn it, they already boarded the plane. Now we can't."

"What? What's going on?" said Eiji.

Two estranged wives, a daughter, and a newborn son... Sure, they're divorced on paper, but they still get together for every seasonal event.

"Rika said she's taking the kids to Reiko-san's for New Year's. She could've told me earlier!"

"Are you kidding? I didn't get any, too... *oohhh*, I see it. I got the message last week. Friggin' *Paris*!"

The end of the year meant getting swamped with work with so many business trips and parties. A week had passed since Eiji got to check his non-work phone.

"Well, I guess it'll be just the two of us this year."

"We can half-ass the spring cleaning, then. No one's going to complain. And I'm not really a big fan of New Year food so much."

"Me, too."

"You don't mind staying at home?"

"I guess it doesn't matter. And you already showed your face the other day."

They've been with each other for a long time, but it could well be their first time spending New Year with just the two of them.

They looked at each other and laughed.

"A Free Day New Year!"

"We can eat what we want!"

The next day, the two men in their forties walked into the supermarket teeming with year-end shoppers.

"Man, this is expensive!" Eiji said with a raised voice as he pushed the cart while looking at the produce section. "400 yen for lettuce? The heck?"

"Spinach is around that, too. Hey, whaddya think? Bad weather or bad harvest?"

The two of them, who had never done their own year-end shopping, were appalled.

"Everything is so expensive."

"But there are fish cakes for the New Year. The expensive ones."

"Ooh, I like the bamboo ones."

"Buy it when you have a business trip to Sendai, instead."

"Yeah, you're right."

"We might as well buy crab meat. Turn it into a hot pot."

Their basket was filled up one after another: Chinese cabbage, green onions, and *daikon*... a higher quality *sake* than usual, beer instead of sparkling wine. Even the snacks they picked were bumped up a notch.

"It is the New Year."

"Yup, it's just once a year."

"You know, if you use that as an excuse, you'll be sorely tempted to buy stuff even if it's expensive."

"Now that's good marketing."

Eiji and Koichi nodded at each other.

"Oh, that reminds me. I'm almost out of shampoo."

"My toothbrush is new, but I wanna replace it."

"Okay! And get undies!"

As they looked through the daily essentials aisle, a middle-aged woman passed by and stared at them with curiosity. However, this wasn't a first, so neither of them worried about it.

After so many ups and downs, they were where they were today. They didn't need to shout their relationship to the world for its approval, but there was no reason to criticize them for it either.

"This'll be fine for now. If we don't have enough, we can always come back tomorrow to buy more."

"Yeah. Or have it delivered."

Eiji smiled with glee as they walked back to their apartment.

"Come on, man. Let's get that thing out."

"...Are we really? You'll turn this into a nest."

"That's what I'm hoping for. Try sitting in it once. It's heaven."

About a week ago, an intense cold wave came down earlier than usual. It got so cold, Eiji lost it and impulsively shopped online.

He fluffed up a square futon, placed a tabletop over it, and plugged it in the outlet.

"Look, it's done. It's Lord Kotatsu!"

"Lord"? Really?"

The man who graciously bought the *kotatsu* cheerfully sat a mandarin on top and had Koichi tuck himself in it.

Warmth slowly spread from under Koichi's feet. "Fuck, that's nice," he said with a moan.

"Right?! So nice."

They couldn't bring themselves to move right after they sat. They arranged everything they needed around the *kotatsu* and turned on the TV.

"Man, I don't recognize any of the singers in the first half of *Kohaku*."

"Oh, but you know these guys, right? Oi. When did this guy turn into a grandpa?"

"We're getting old, too, you know. Of course, it's the same case for those guys."

Their legs sought each other under the *kotatsu* and fed off each other's body heat.

As they were dozing off, the *Kohaku* show ended, and they could hear the New Year's bell ringing from behind the TV and outside the window at the same time.

"It's the end of another year, huh."

"So it is."

Eiji placed his hands on Koichi's cheeks and put their foreheads together.

"Thanks for this year. And thank you for next year."

Koichi looked away as if embarrassed, and his mouth went slack.

"Yeah. Same here."

When their lips pressed lightly together, both their phones vibrated at the same time. It was a group call from Maiko.

"Hey, Dads! Happy New Year! Is it lonely with just the two of you? Nah! You're most likely all over each other!"

"If you know that, then leave them alone."

"You're wasting your breath."

The exasperated voices of their ex-wives could be heard.

"Maiko, be careful when going home."

"Wear a mask so strange men won't make a pass at you."

Maiko burst into unabashed laughter at her fathers' usual advice.

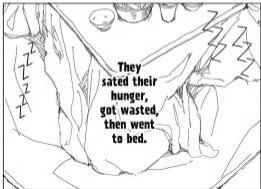
2018.01.01 A New Year Chikuwa Party Fit for Old Men



2018.01.02



2018.01.03



2018.01.04





All about the Japanese New Year (at least the ones that are mentioned!)

The *Kohaku Uta Gassen* (Red and White Song Battle) is an annual New Year's Eve TV special aired by NHK. It's composed of two competing teams between female (red) and male artists (white). Winners are decided through judge and audience voting.

The first visit of the Japan New Year to a Buddhist temple or Shinto shrine is called the *Hatsumode*.

The *New Year Ekiden* is an annual road running relay (over 100km) which takes place on the 1st of January.

Aeon, or *Æon*, is a retail company (they own JUSCO and Ministop if you've been around South East/East Asia).